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UNCLAS MADRID 001072

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SP](#) [PSOE](#)

SUBJECT: NEW SOCIALIST MAJORITY APPEARS STABLE

REF: MADRID 900

1. (SBU) Summary. The margin of the Socialist (PSOE) victory on March 14 should allow them to take power without any formal coalition agreements with smaller parties. While the PSOE's 164 seats fall 12 short of an absolute majority, it should allow them to govern stably, especially given the fact that the Popular Party (PP) has no realistic alternative coalition to challenge the PSOE. The Socialists have stated that they will form coalitions as needed on an issue-by-issue basis, freeing them from being dependent on leftist or nationalist coalition partners. While the Spanish system has no set date for the investiture of the new government, expectations are that the process will move quickly and that the Zapatero administration will be installed by mid to late April. End Summary.

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Stable PSOE Majority  
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2. (SBU) Though not the 176 votes necessary for an absolute majority in Congress, the PSOE majority is large enough to govern comfortably by historic standards. Both major parties won with less than absolute majorities in the 1990's (the PSOE in 1993 with 159 seats and the PP in 1996 with 156 seats), and were able to maintain stable governments. The 164 seats that the PSOE received on March 14 are sufficient to counter the most likely alternative combination of votes (the PP's 148 seats with the CiU's (moderate Catalan nationalists) 10 seats and the Canaries Coalition's 3, for a total of 161 votes), even without the support of the other parties. Given that legislation can be passed by a simple majority, the PSOE position in Congress thus appears secure. The PSOE can count on the 13 votes of the other leftist parties (ERC (leftist Catalan nationalists) with eight, IU (Communists) with five) on most issues to increase the Socialist's margin. The inability of the PP in opposition to attract potential coalition partners permits the PSOE to enter into governance with no formal coalition agreements, allowing the Socialists to avoid having to make deals on ministerial positions or controversial issues that could potentially alienate moderate voters.

3. (SBU) On issues such as the devolution of powers to the regions, where the Basque and Catalan nationalist parties may differ from the Socialists, the PP has already pledged its support to maintain the territorial integrity of Spain, and would agree with Socialist positions that support this principle.

4. (SBU) In the other legislative chamber, the PP lost 24 seats in the Senate on March 14 (from 127 to 103). However, they remain only two seats short of an absolute majority of 105 seats. With the support of the 3 seats of the Canaries Coalition (CC), the PP should be able to control the Senate. However, given the weak powers of the Senate, the most the PP can hope for is to delay and amend legislation, not kill it, as the Senate can be overridden by the Congress of Deputies.

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Investiture Schedule  
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5. (SBU) The first step in the formation of the Zapatero government occurs on April 2 with the choosing of the President of the Congress (see reftel). That position will almost certainly go to the PSOE's former foreign policy spokesman in Congress, Manuel Marin, who is PSOE leader Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's choice for the job. While the process for the election of Zapatero as President of the Government could take until the beginning of May, it is widely expected that the process will go rapidly. MFA contacts have predicted that the Zapatero government should be in power by April 14-19. Some smaller parties have already indicated their support for Zapatero's investiture, without any coalition agreement, which would allow the PSOE leader to be elected President of the Government on the first round of voting in the Congress of Deputies with the support of an absolute majority. Even if he does not receive an absolute majority on the first round, Zapatero can become President of the Government on a second round of votes in Congress by a simple majority.

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